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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended as a resource for mainstream classroom teachers, K-12, who want to provide language minority students with additional support in their transition into classes where English is the language of instruction. The guide may also be used to help teachers make instruction more effective for all students and for teacher training. Areas addressed include the following: (1) assessing students in content-specific language proficiency (a table of predominant language functions required in selected content areas and a sample assessment instrument for content-specific language functions are provided; (2) setting up a buddy system with English-proficient peers; (3) preparing the student for a content-area lesson by teaching core vocabulary in advance and contextualizing lessons; (4) making language more comprehensible; (5) using cooperative grouping; and (6) collaborating with the English-as-a-Second-Language teacher. It is recommended that language minority students be regarded as resources in the mainstream classroom rather than as different or inferior. This provides a greater likelihood of their becoming proficient in English and succeeding in mainstream classes, while enriching the education of all students. (MSE)

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Helping Language Minority Students After They Exit From Bilingual/ESL Programs

A Handbook for Teachers

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Introduction

This guide is a resource for mainstream classroom teachers (K–12) who want to provide language minority students with additional support to help their transition into the classes where English is the medium of instruction. Many of the suggestions offered, however, can contribute to making education more effective for all students, not just those who have a language background other than English. The guide also can be used for teacher training, to increase mainstream classroom teachers' awareness of some of the factors that may contribute to difficulties encountered by language minority students even after they have been graduated from bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

The linguistic demands on students in content area classes increase as a function of grade level. A look at elementary school curricula reveals an increasing emphasis on literacy in the middle and upper grades as a medium for transferring academic content area knowledge (Chamot 1983). This emphasis on literacy invariably necessitates a command of cognitively demanding academic language skills, particularly those required in the content areas.

Some language functions, such as following directions, asking for clarification, and understanding specialized vocabulary are predominant in all of the content areas. Others, such as obtaining information from graphs, charts and tables, are more content-specific. The language functions that are predominant in Science, Math and Social Studies are listed in Table 1. These specific language functions as well as the more generalized or holistic ability to understand and express content area concepts are potential areas of difficulty for students with limitations in English-language proficiency. The first step for teachers to take when a student, who has exited from a bilingual education or ESL class, joins the all-English-medium classroom is to assess that student's English-language skills in these specific and global areas of content-specific language proficiency.

Assessing Students in Content-specific Language Proficiency

Before assessing students' language proficiency, you should find out as much as possible about the educational history of the students who exited from the bilingual or ESL program. In many districts, the special program designed for language minority students is kept isolated from other programs in the school. This is not only ineffective for students in the special program, but also makes it quite difficult to ensure the continuity between the special program and the mainstream. Programs for language minority students vary tremendously from district to district; in fact, they even vary within large districts from school to school. It is important to find out what instructional components were given to the student, and in what context.

Here are some pertinent questions that might help you to gauge your students' experience:

1. How much content area instruction was integrated with ESL?

2. Was the ESL instruction based upon content-based thematic units or was it guided by language units?

3. What content area textbooks was the student exposed to? In what language?

4. If the student was in a bilingual program, what content area curriculum was covered in the student's native language?

Next, you may wish to complete an informal assessment of the student's ability to use content-specific language functions, such as those listed in Table 1. This can be done by developing a simple rating scale based on selected language functions which could be observed by any teacher who knows the student. For example, the third linguistic function under listening can be transformed into an assessment instrument by rating the student's ability to understand explanations without concrete referents (without reference to non-linguistic aids such as pictures, etc.). As an illustration of this, one might try to determine if the student is able to understand an explanation of the rules for a simple card game (where the cards are not utilized during the explanation). The assessment scale would extend from "not at all" to "very well, most of the time." Figure 1 presents a sample assessment instrument based on some of the more observable items from the list provided in Table 1. The sample in Figure 1 can be modified by adding items that are important in your own context and by omitting others that are not.

Any teacher who is familiar with the student can use this assessment instrument. The ESL teacher who has either taught your

Table 1

Predominant language functions required in selected content areas

	Science	Math	Social Studies
LISTENING			
1. Understanding explanations.	●	●	●
2. Listening for specific information.	●	●	
3. Understanding explanations without concrete referents.	●	●	
4. Following directions for experiments.	●		
5. Understanding oral numbers.		●	
6. Understanding oral word problems.		●	
SPEAKING			
1. Answering questions.	●	●	●
2. Asking for clarification.	●	●	●
3. Participating in discussions.	●		●
4. Explaining and demonstrating a process.	●		
5. Presenting oral reports.			●
6. Explaining how an answer was derived.		●	
READING			
1. Understanding specialized vocabulary.	●	●	●
2. Understanding information/explanations in textbooks.	●	●	●
3. Finding information from graphs, charts, and tables.			●
4. Following directions for experiments.	●		●
5. Finding information in reference materials.	●		●
6. Reading at varied rates (skimming and scanning).			●
7. Reading mathematical notations and equations.		●	
8. Understanding written word problems.		●	
WRITING			
1. Writing answers to questions.	●	●	●
2. Noting observations.	●		
3. Describing experiments.	●		
4. Writing reports.	●		●
5. Labeling maps, graphs, and charts.			●
6. Writing verbal input numerically.		●	

Adapted by A. Willig (1989) from Chamot, A.U. & O'Malley, J.M. (1986) *A Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach: An ESL Content-Based Curriculum.* Rosslyn, VA: NCBE.

Figure 1

Sample assessment instrument for content-specific language functions

Student: **Date:**

Teacher: **Subject Taught:**

Listening: The student is able to

1. Understand explanations without concrete referents.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

2. Follow directions for experiments.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

3. Understand oral numbers.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

4. Understand oral word problems.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

Speaking: The student is able to

1. Answer questions.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

2. Ask for clarification.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

3. Participate in discussions.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

4. Explain and demonstrate a process.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

5. Present oral reports.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

6. Explain how an answer was derived.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

Reading

1. Understand specialized vocabulary.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

2. Understand information/explanations in textbooks.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

3. Find information from graphs, charts, and tables.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

4. Follow directions for experiments.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

5. Find information in reference materials.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

6. Read at varied rates (skimming and scanning).

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

7. Read mathematical notations and equations.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

8. Understand written word problems.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

Writing: The student is able to

1. Write answers to questions.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

2. Note observations.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

3. Describe experiments.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

4. Write reports.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

5. Label maps, graphs, and charts.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

6. Write verbal input numerically.

not at all *some of the time* *very well most of the time*

students in the past or is currently teaching them would be a valuable resource person for this assessment even if the content area is not integrated with the instruction of ESL. You also can fill this out once the student becomes more familiar to you, and you have had a chance to observe the student in class informally.

An observational rating scale is also helpful for an ongoing assessment of language minority students (or, in fact, for any student in your class). If you rate the student occasionally by using the same rating scale and by dating your ratings, you will have a continuing record of a student's proficiency in precisely those language functions which you have determined to be important in the acquisition of concepts in different content areas. This rating will allow you to keep track of any changes in students' content-specific language skills and of their progress over time.

Another way of assessing students' ability to handle content area material in English is by creating a simple reading test from the textbook being used in the content area class, and by comparing language minority students' performance on the test to that of language majority students. A cloze procedure is adequate for this purpose. Choose a representative passage from the textbook and make a cloze passage out of it by blanking out every seventh word, leaving the first and last sentences intact. Ask the students to read the entire passage before attempting to fill in the blanks. Then, ask them to fill in each blank with the word which they think fits best. (See Cohen 1980, for a description of how to construct a cloze test.) By giving the test to the entire class, you can establish a standard against which the language minority students' performances can be compared. Calculate the average number of correct responses for the group of language majority students on the same cloze passage. If a language minority student scores more than ten percentage points below the average score of the language majority students, you may need to monitor that student's performance in class and consider some of the ideas suggested in the following sections of this guide.

One of the first things that can be done to help a language minority student make a smooth transition into the mainstream is to pair him or her with an English proficient peer. The role of the buddy is to serve as a guide to the mainstream classroom by helping the student understand the tasks that students face daily. It is best to

Setting Up a Buddy System

choose buddies from among the student's age and academic peers, so the buddy can guide the student through various activities during the school day. If the buddy is also to do some tutoring, either during or after class, it may be advisable to assign an older tutor. The following process is suggested for setting up a buddy system.

(1) Recruiting and selecting buddies.

Solicit recommendations for buddies from other teachers, or ask for volunteers from among your own students. Buddies may be bilingual themselves or they may be monolingual English-speaking students. Buddies who share a language other than English with the student would be able to provide the language minority student with native-language mediation; on the other hand, an English-speaking buddy would provide more reinforcement in English. If students have completed two or three years in a bilingual or ESL program, it is likely that they no longer need 100 percent mediation through their native language; thus, an English-speaking buddy may be more appropriate for those students. Select the buddies on the basis of how interested they are in other cultures, how well they work independently, how well they communicate and explain, how responsible they are, and how patient they are with others (Bohlender 1986). Cross-age tutors do not need to be selected from among the highest-achieving students. In fact, assigning a tutoring role to lower achieving students who are experiencing academic difficulty themselves is beneficial to those students as well, and at the same time is very helpful to the students being tutored (Heath 1990).

(2) Training the buddies.

The training should focus on the specific expectations of the buddies as well as of their partners. Also, recruit the help of the ESL teacher, who can show the buddies or tutors some simple teaching techniques and strategies. The suggestions given in this guide on how to adapt lessons and how to teach some core vocabulary in advance are also useful for tutors (see Buehler and Meltesen 1983, for a listing of simple guidelines for tutors). Suggestions also can be given to tutors or buddies as to how to obtain information about the students' native language and culture from the students themselves. Not only do the buddies benefit from this information, but also the exchange of information equalizes the status of the two

partners, and contributes to a more effective relationship.

(3) Providing in-class support.

Allow buddies to work closely in class with the language minority student to whom they have been assigned. You may want to change the physical arrangement of the classroom in order for pairwork to be possible on an ongoing basis.

However, a warning is in order. Although the language minority student ends up with a constant and helpful guide, the teacher needs to ensure that all communication with the student does not pass through the buddy, but rather is addressed to the student directly. We have observed cases where the teacher gets too comfortable with the buddy system and begins to rely too heavily on the buddy. In these situations, the teacher begins to talk less and less frequently to the language minority student and opts to address him or her only through the intermediary. The teacher also needs to ensure that the language minority student is not neglected and is included in all activities in the classroom.

A cooperative learning approach, which is described in the last section of this guide, is one way of ensuring that language minority students are actively involved in all classroom activities (Cochran 1989).

(4) Monitoring the tutoring process.

Daily monitoring of the tutoring process is essential, especially during the first two months. Ask buddies to reflect on how they are doing, what aspects of the tutoring they find easiest or most difficult, and in what areas they need more training or help. Buddies also may wish to meet together once a month to exchange ideas and insights. You also need to give the buddies some recognition either in the form of credit or a token present (for example, a lapel pin containing the flag of the country or state of origin of the tutee) that makes the students feel part of a distinctive group.

The duration of the formal partnership between a buddy or a tutor and a language minority student varies. When the student begins to feel more comfortable with the instruction in the mainstream classroom, he or she will rely less on the buddy and eventually will move away completely from the partnership. Buddies need to be alerted to this likelihood so that they are not disappointed or

feel rejected. It is not uncommon, however, for a buddy to remain friends with the language minority student even when formal help is no longer necessary.

Preparing the Student for a Content Area Lesson

One of the difficulties that language minority students face in content area classrooms is the simultaneous processing of new vocabulary items and cognitively demanding concepts. Teachers can prepare students for a lesson that is to be taught by following two simple steps. First, they can let students become familiar with the core vocabulary that will be essential in presenting the lesson to a class. Second, they can provide students with information about the lesson prior to the formal presentation of the lesson.

This is a difficult task for a single teacher to do alone. Teachers of different content areas may wish to collaborate in this effort by letting each other know what lessons they are working on with a group of language minority students and to share their support strategies with other teachers who have those students in their classrooms. This will provide some continuity in the different components of instruction that a student receives and will also provide teachers with a wider context within which to teach the students. Although most teachers do not have much opportunity to interact with other teachers within the school day, it may be worth the additional effort to do so. Some teachers opt for a simple form that they can use to exchange information on each group of students, while others leave it up to informal but regularly scheduled get-togethers. Teachers also may wish to recruit the help of the peer tutors by assigning them the task of vocabulary presentation, as suggested in the following section.

(1) Teaching core vocabulary in advance.

The principle behind this suggestion is simple. If students are familiar with the core vocabulary that constitutes a given lesson, they are more likely to understand new concepts presented through those words. This is especially an issue with language minority students, because they may not even be familiar with some less common non-content-related words. The language minority student needs to become familiar with these types of words, along with the content-specific ones, before the beginning of a lesson. For example, a lesson on the human heart (see Figure 2) might involve less common words such as: valves, pump blood, veins, and arteries.

1. Most textbooks highlight the content-specific words in each chapter. If the textbook you are using does not do that, identify a list of content-specific words for each lesson you are about to present. This list could range between five and seven words. Write those words on a sheet of paper, indicating the chapter in the textbook from which they came.

2. Scan the chapter and your lesson plan for other generic words that you suspect your language minority students may not be familiar with. Add those four or five words to your list. Cross-age tutors may be able to help you with these first two steps.

3. Give your language minority students the list of words, preferably the day before you are to present the lesson.

4. Ask your students to try and find out the meaning of these core words by referring to the chapter from which they were taken. Students may use a dictionary or work in pairs, with their buddies or with other language minority students, to figure out the meaning of the core words. Encourage students to guess the meaning of confusing words from the pictures in the chapter.

5. Students can write their own explanations of the words or translations, or even draw illustrations that will serve as meaning clues. They can bring their list of words to class the following day and use it as a resource.

(2) Contextualizing a lesson.

An extensive introduction to a lesson helps clarify the context in which new concepts are to be presented. The teacher needs to familiarize students with the general area under consideration (Mohan 1986), and to give students a set of ideas or plans with which to make sense out of new information.

1. Draw from the students' personal experience in the topical area or one closely related to it. For example, if you are teaching a lesson on the heart, get students to tell you about any experiences they have had with family members or friends who have heart problems and the causes of the problem.

2. Have the students, either in small groups or in pairs, list everything they know about the topic to be presented.

3. Guide the students in categorizing the different pieces of information they have listed. They may do this in the form of a web, such as the one presented in Figure 2. This helps to organize the information that students already have about a topic to prepare

to learn more about it.

4. To help students read a chapter in a content-area textbook more easily, highlight the main idea and supporting details of the chapter. This can be done either by the teacher, a teacher's aide, or by a cross-age tutor. Most textbooks highlight the main idea of each chapter, but the summary sentence may be either buried in the text or may be linguistically too complex for second language learners. In either case, the sentence (or two) can be pulled out and written in simple English on a separate sheet of paper and given to students for reference.

Making Language More Comprehensible

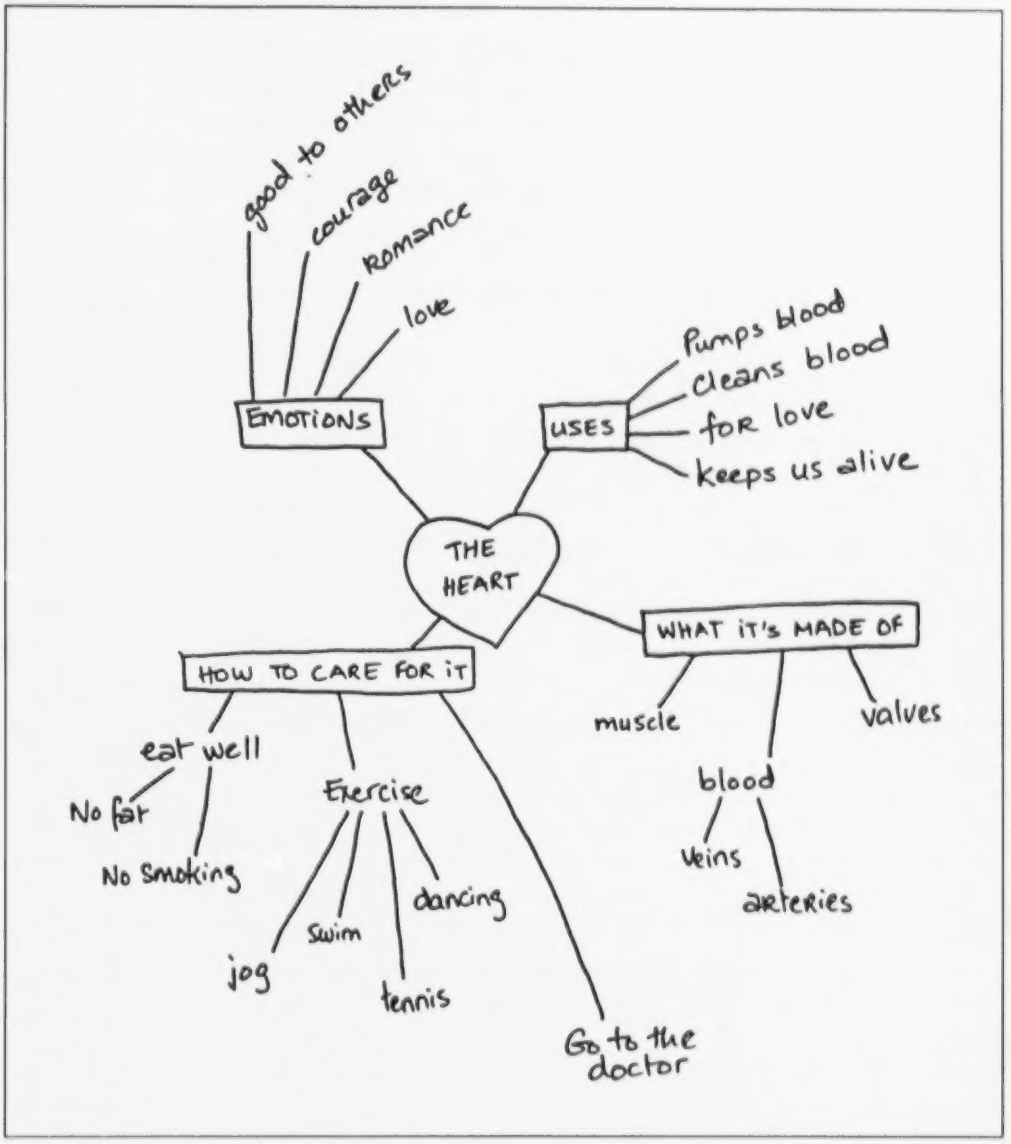
As mentioned in the introduction, one of the difficulties that language minority students encounter in the mainstream classroom is in processing abstract cognitively demanding information in English. To make their task easier, hands-on demonstrations should be used as often as possible. By demonstrating new concepts, meaning is conveyed not through language alone, but with the help of concrete referents that the students can touch, hear, and see (and sometimes taste and smell!). In hands-on demonstrations, meaning is also invariably conveyed through gestures and body language, making it easier for students to comprehend the concepts being presented.

To accompany these hands-on demonstrations, teachers also can attempt to simplify their language and to contextualize it as much as possible. This general strategy of making content-specific language more comprehensible is known as "sheltered instruction." Sheltered classrooms essentially use ESL teaching techniques to teach content-area lessons and attempt to make instruction more comprehensible for students who are learning English as a second language. Teachers in these classrooms are conscious that language minority students are developing their language at the same time they are developing concepts (Krashen and Biber 1988).

In sheltered classrooms, instruction is given in a controlled "sheltered" format. The language used by teachers is characterized by linguistic modifications, such as simplified (but always accurate and appropriate) syntactic structures, controlled vocabulary, and shortened sentences. In addition, much of the language used by the teacher already is known to students, and the language that is new is acquired in a meaningful context. Changing one's speech style consciously in order to accommodate listeners is very difficult, espe-

Figure 2

A web categorizing students' ideas about the heart



cially when the primary goal of communication is the teaching of new concepts. Teachers who are either reluctant to try this strategy or who have encountered frustration at the difficulty of the task may want to consider getting help from a colleague. Teachers can help each other by observing one another in the classroom setting and by coaching each other in very specific teaching tasks. Coaching can be a very useful tool for developing and improving skills, especially in the area of sheltered instruction (Kwiat 1988).

Another characteristic of sheltered instruction is the active involvement of students in the act of learning. Lessons usually revolve around an activity, and students are led to their own discoveries about the concept being taught. These discoveries are attained under the guidance of the teacher and by working together with other students in cooperative groups. Thus, students can be given a topic to research or an experiment to complete; they do these activities in small groups, where each student has a specific role to play.

To summarize, sheltered classes provide instruction through context embedded language, through active participation of students in the lesson, and by building on students' own experiences.

Classroom Management: Cooperative Grouping

Cooperative grouping has been shown to be an effective classroom management technique that promotes learning among heterogeneous groups of students (Slavin 1981). The approach is different both from traditional whole classroom instruction and from other forms of group work. In cooperative groups, students of different levels are assigned roles which encourage them to work interdependently on a specific task.

Cooperative groups are heterogeneous both linguistically and in reading or ability level. Thus, language minority students are mixed in with language majority students; students who are having difficulty reading the textbook work alongside those who are reading at or above grade level. The roles that are assigned in groups vary, but the following types of roles are common to different models of cooperative grouping: a materials director, who is responsible for getting and putting away the material needed for the activity; a timekeeper, who makes sure that the group keeps track of the time involved; a supervisor, who makes sure that the group is doing what it is supposed to do; and a reporter, who is responsible for either writing or telling students in other groups about the group's activity. The assignments are changed occasionally so that every student

has a chance to experience the different roles involved. It is essential, however, that a role be assigned to each student to ensure that no one strays; in fact, you may wish to assign a student the role of the monitor whose responsibility it is to make sure that everyone in the group is on task.

Cooperative grouping is especially useful for involving language minority students who have just joined the mainstream classroom from the ESL or bilingual program. These students can be an integral part of any small group by virtue of the role that each student is assigned. If the activity is well chosen, each student has a vital part to play in completing the task that the group is given. Each member of the group becomes important for the success of the group, and consequently, the language minority student is not left out of the activity.

Cooperative grouping is also very helpful to language minority students in content-area classrooms because it promotes activity-centered lessons, where students work together to complete a given task. Students not only learn from each other but also have a chance to hear and speak language that is related to the task at hand. As mentioned in the preceding section, active involvement of the student is one way of ensuring learning. (See Cochran 1989 for a detailed description of how to set up a cooperative group in the classroom.)

Teacher Collaboration: Working with the ESL Teacher

The content teacher, especially at the middle and secondary levels, often does not have the specialized training for teaching language minority students that the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher has received. Collaborative efforts between content and ESL teachers can be most effective since such cooperation allows for the creating of language-rich activities that help the language minority student understand the content work better. The ESL teacher can be an important resource for mainstream teachers. The ESL teacher can assist the content teacher to reduce linguistic problems by suggesting how materials and the level of language used for instruction may be modified and by helping identify potential areas of difficulty. Content learning is facilitated when reliance on language is reduced by using demonstrations, visuals, and gestures, and by encouraging students to work together in problem-solving and cooperative activities. In order to achieve this, consistent commitment and collaboration is required of language and content

teachers in order to make all classrooms effective learning environments for language minority students.

Conclusion: Language Minority Students As Resources in the Mainstream Classroom

The time and energy it takes to provide language minority students in the mainstream classroom with some type of assistance to help them in their transition from the ESL or bilingual program is certainly worth the investment. Many of the students who have exited from special programs such as ESL or bilingual education may not be ready to tackle the rather difficult task of functioning in an academic setting where English is the medium of instruction. In order to succeed in school, a student ultimately must feel as though he or she truly belongs in the mainstream classroom. Many language minority students are branded as different, as having had a special need in the past, and having been involved in a special program that is perceived by some in the school as being inferior. Sadly, it is also the case that students, and sometimes faculty, who do not belong to a language minority group, may think of bilingualism and cultural diversity as problems that need to be overcome. These attitudes, among other factors, often present serious hurdles to language minority students.

Changing the attitudes of others is an arduous task that many may not want to undertake. Yet, it is our responsibility to see to it that language and cultural diversity are seen as a tremendous source of richness from which all students can benefit. Thus, in addition to asking what we can do for language minority students, we should be asking what language minority students—in particular, those students who are limited in their English proficiency—can do for language majority students and the rest of the school.

Language minority students' contributions could be numerous: they can teach others their language and about their language; they can teach others about their cultural heritage and their way of doing things. Language minority students can serve as native-language tutors to peers or younger students who need native-language support. They also can serve as links to parents who are not proficient in English. In short, they can expand a school's horizons and open a pathway to all corners of a school building, the community in which the school resides and other lands beyond the school's immediate surroundings.

By adopting this view, we would be ensuring a higher likelihood of language minority students becoming proficient in English

and succeeding in the mainstream, at the same time providing all students with a richer and more vibrant education.

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